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ABSTRACT

The perception of typical U.S. college students toward the Reagan administration's foreign policy is that it is based on the principle that Communism must be stopped at any cost. Students' beliefs are defined according to their reactions to specific U.S. foreign policy initiatives. Three areas have aroused considerable campus reaction and exemplify students' perception of this "stop Communism" approach as controlling U.S. foreign policy. The areas are: (1) nuclear arms proliferation; (2) divestiture in South Africa; and (3) U.S. support for the Contras in Nicaragua. Students believe that the eventual goal of the arms race is to achieve a balance of power aimed at stopping Communism. Students also believe that divestiture in South Africa is opposed by the Reagan administration because the government fears that divestiture may drive that nation into the Soviet camp. The students understand that the Reagan administration views the Contras as "freedom fighters" struggling for the democratic way. U.S. students would like to see a more idealistic approach in foreign policy. They see the nuclear arms race as an activity which risks planetary annihilation. They would prefer an arms limitation and a U.S. foreign policy which advocates human rights in South Africa. They would like a foreign policy which views other nations as equals instead of one that supports internal conflicts. (SM)

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AMERICAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

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In presenting a position paper on American college students' perceptions of American foreign policy, I shall be leaving unanswered the question of whether there actually is a current, coherent, objective American foreign policy - and if so, what it is. Rather, what I shall be trying to do is to outline what I believe is the current "average" view of American foreign policy among American students. You will note that I use the word "average," since there is, of course, a broad spectrum of opinions held by American students about American foreign policy. What I will attempt to give you is, I hope, the common (i.e., the majority) opinion of American foreign policy among American college students.

Let me further limit my subject. I shall be presenting here only what I feel is the "key" point of American foreign policy, in the view of American students. By "key" point of American foreign policy, I mean the overriding principle which governs American foreign policy. Also, I shall be presenting the American students' view of the overriding foreign policy principle of the current (Reagan) administration...although I think that this principle has characterized almost all U.S. administrations since the Truman administration. Finally, I shall be basing my analysis of the American students' view concerning American foreign policy on student reaction to world phenomena which have been triggered or influenced by American foreign policy. In other words, I shall be gathering my data from my reading of such things as anti-nuclear marches conducted by students, South African "shanty towns" erected on campuses, and student protests against destabilization exploits by the C.I.A.

I believe that, in the view of American college students, the overriding principle of American foreign policy is simply this: Communism must be stopped at any cost. I further believe that students understand this principle as a reactive one, i.e., as one which asserts no positive goals of its own, but simply sets its strategy in terms of making a response to the initiatives of Communist ideologies.

I will cite three areas which have recently aroused considerable campus reaction, and which I think exemplify students' perception of this "stop Communism" approach as governing American foreign policy. The areas are nuclear arms proliferation, divestiture in South Africa, and American support for the Contras in Nicaragua.

Regarding nuclear arms proliferation, it seems clear to American students that the arms race is being engaged in by the United States with the hope of stopping Communism from further encroaching on the territory of free nations. The basic idea is that, if the United States establishes a "balance of power" (some would say a "balance of terror"), then Communist countries would not dare mount an attack for fear of being obliterated themselves in a counter-attack. Thus, the arms race, in aiming at achieving a balance of power, is ultimately aiming at stopping Communism, or at least holding it at bay.

Students believe that divestiture in South Africa is currently

being opposed -- or at least not advocated -- by the Reagan administration because of the Reagan administration's fear that the practice of divestiture might ultimately drive the Union of South Africa into the Soviet camp. Thus, the administration's aversion to divestiture seems also to be based on the "stop Communism" principle.

Students suspect that American support for the Contras is advocated by the Reagan administration because the Contras are seen by the Reagan administration as struggling "freedom fighters" who need American help in their efforts against the communistic Sandinistas in Nicaragua in order to win a truly democractic form of government.

American foreign policy, as exemplified in the three areas just described, is thus seen by American students as being based on the principle of stopping Communism at any cost. The words "at any cost" should be noted. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., once wrote an article entitled "The Necessary Amorality of Foreign Affairs." That title symbolizes the pragmatic approach to foreign affairs which holds that, once a course of policy is established as absolutely essential, then whatever means which will most efficiently achieve that policy are the means to be used, irrespective of whether some might consider those means to be morally wrong.

I believe American students would like to see a more idealistic approach taken toward American foreign policy. I think I can detect

the outlines of what that appraoch would be in student reactions to the Reagan administration policies. Students see the nuclear arms race as an activity which escalates the risk of planetary annihilation. In place of the arms race they would rather see arms limitation, if not total disarmament. They see failure to discourage American business investment in South Africa as providing support for a government which viciously enforces the dehumanizing practice of apartheid. They would rather see an American foreign policy which advocates human rights in all countries of the world -- not just in Russia. Finally, they see the provision of military aid to the Contras by the U.S. as an act of interference in the internal affairs of another sovereign state. Instead, they would like to see an American foreign policy which respectfully treats other nations as equals and leads them by example rather than by trying to bring them down through subversion if they do not perform as the U.S. wishes.

I have tried to present what I believe the average American student understands present American foriegn policy to be, and what I think, alternatively, the average student believes it <u>ought</u> to be. To reduce these views to one word, students see the administration's foreign policy as pragmatic. They would rather have it be idealistic.